

CHAPTER XIX. ROSE COLOR.

OF course she recovered. What else could she do? If a man is dying for want of bread and you give him bread enough and to spare, he will regain strength and life, will he not? And so with Dolly. Having found Grif, she had nothing to die for and so much to live for, that she lived. It seemed, too, that even if she had been inclined to die, Grif would have held her fast to earth. It was worse than useless to attempt to delude him into leaving her side, even for an hour; he hung over the invalid's couch, in such an anguish of half-despairing anxiety that the hearts of the unceremoniously deposed nurses were quite touched. He watched every change in Dolly's face, every brightening or fading tint in her cheek, every glance of her eyes; he followed her every movement. If she was tired of her posture, he could raise her or lay her down and settle her cushions as no one else could; if she was strong enough to listen, he could talk to her; if she was too weak, he could be silent.

But naturally there was much to talk about. Not that the period of his absence had been a very eventful one. It was as Ralph Gowan had fancied,--he had been living quietly enough in a secluded London street during the whole of the time; but Dolly found the history of his self-banishment both interesting and soul-moving. The story of his miseries brought the tears into her eyes, and his picture of what he had suffered on that unhappy night, when he had rushed out of the house and left her insensible upon the sofa, made her cling to his hand convulsively and sob outright.

"I can scarcely believe you are here,--quite safe," she would say; "you might have killed yourself."

And indeed he had been in no small danger of so doing.

Among all this, however, there was one bit of brightness,--a wonderful piece of news he told her that very day after his return. Fortune had, with her usual caprice, condescended to smile upon him at last. Incredible as it appeared, he had "got into something," and this "something" was actually remunerative,--reasonably remunerative, if not extravagantly so. Four hundred a year would pay the rent of the figurative house in Putney or elsewhere, and buy the green sofa and appurtenances, at least. Dolly could scarcely believe it, and, indeed, he scarcely believed it himself.

"It seemed as if, when I had lost all else, this came to add to the bitterness of the loss," he said. "I am afraid I was far from being as grateful, at first, as I ought to have been. I could only remember how happy such luck would have made us both if it had only come a year or so earlier. And the very day I got the place I passed the upholsterer's where the parlor furniture was,--green sofa and all. And I went home with the firm intention of blowing my brains out. The only thing that saved me that day was the fact that my landlady met me at the door with a miserable story about her troubles and her taxes, and by the time I had listened for half an hour, and done something she wanted done, I had

cooled down a little, though I was wretched enough."

"The 'something' was paying the taxes, was n't it?" questioned Dolly.

"Something of that kind," admitted Griffith.

"Ah," said Dolly, "I thought so."

Very naturally Griffith felt some slight embarrassment on encountering Miss MacDowlas, having a rather unpleasant recollection of various incidents of the past. But Miss Berenice faced the matter in a different manner and with her usual decision of character. She had made up her mind to receive Griffith Donne as a respectable fact, and then, through Dolly's eloquence, she had learned to regard him with even a sort of affection,--a vague affection, of course, at the outset, but one which would ripen with time. Thus she rather surprised him by confronting him upon an entirely new ground. She was cordial and amiable, and on the first opportunity she explained her change of feeling with great openness.

"I have heard so much of you from Dolly," she said, "that I am convinced I have known nothing of you before. I hope we shall be better friends. I am very fond of Dolly. I wish I had known her three or four years ago."

And there was such a softened tenderness in her thin, unpromising face, that from thenceforward Griffith's doubts were removed and his opinion

altered, as hers had done. The woman who had loved and pitied Dolly when she so sorely needed pity and love, must be worthy of gratitude and affection.

Phil and Toinette and Mollie arriving, in the deepest affliction, to receive Dolly's last farewell, were rather startled by the turn affairs had taken. Changed as she was, the face she turned to greet them was not the face of a dying girl. She was deplorably pale and shrunken and thin, but the light of life was in her eyes and a new ring was in her voice. She had vitality enough to recognize fresh charms in Tod, and spirit enough to make a few jokes.

"She won't die," commented Phil to his wife when they retired to their room.

"No," said Mrs. Phil, discreetly, "it is not likely, now Grif has come back. But it won't do to waste the journey, Phil, so we may as well stay awhile. We have not been anywhere out of London this summer."

Accordingly, with their usual genius for utilizing all things, they prolonged their visit and made it into a kind of family festival; and since their anxiety on Dolly's behalf was at an end, they managed to enjoy it heartily. They walked here, and rode there, and explored unheard-of points and places; they kept the quiet people in the quiet hotel in a constant state of pleasant ferment with their good spirits and unceremonious friendliness. Mollie and Aimée and Mrs. Phil excited

such general admiration that when they made their appearance at the table d'hôte there was a visible stir and brightening, and Dolly was so constantly inquired after, that there were serious thoughts entertained of issuing hourly bulletins. The reaction of high spirits after their fears was something exhilarating even to beholders.

And while they enjoyed themselves, and explored, and instituted a high carnival of innocent rejoicing, Dolly directed all her energies to the task of getting well and filling Grif's soul with hope and bliss. As soon as she had fully recovered they were to be married,--not a day, not an hour, longer would Grif consent to wait. His only trouble was that she would not be strong enough to superintend the purchase of the green sofa and appurtenances. Aimée had, however, proved his rock of refuge as usual. They were to return to London together and make the necessary preparations, and then the wedding was to take place in Geneva, and the bride would be carried home in triumph.

"We have been so long in travelling toward the little house at Putney that it will be the nicest bridal tour we could have," said Dolly.

Then, of course, came some pleasant excitement in connection with the trousseau, in which everybody was involved. The modest hotel had never before been in such a state of mind through secret preparations, as it was when Dolly was well enough to sit up and walk about and choose patterns. Her instinct of interest in worldly vanities sustained that young person marvellously. When Grif and Aimée had returned to London

she found herself well enough to give lengthy audiences to Mrs. Phil, who, with Miss MacDowlas, had taken the business of purchasing in hand, and to discuss fabrics and fashions by the hour. She remembered Grif's enthusiasm on the subject of her toilets, and she was wholly ruled by a secret and laudable ambition to render herself as irresistible as possible. She exercised to its utmost her inventive genius, and lay awake at night to devise simple but coquettish feminine snares of attire to delight and bewilder him in the future.

She might well progress rapidly toward health and strength. By the time the house was ready for her reception she was well enough to drive out and explore with the rest, though she looked frail and unsubstantial by contrast with Mollie's bloom and handsome Mrs. Phil's grand curves. She was gaining flesh and color every day, but the slender throat and wrists and transparent hands were a bitter reproach to Grif even then, and it would be many weeks before she could again indulge in that old harmless vanity in her dimples and smooth roundness of form.

Mollie mourned over her long, in secret, and, indeed, was so heart-wrung by the sight of the change she found in her, that the very day of her arrival had not drawn to its close before she burst upon her with a remorseful appeal for forgiveness.

"But even if you forgive me I shall not forgive myself," she said. "I shall never forget that dreadful night when I found out that it was all my fault, and that you had borne everything without telling me. If--if

it had not been for--for Mr. Gowan, Dolly, I think I should have died."

"If it had not been for whom?" asked Dolly.

"Mr. Gowan," answered Miss Mollie, dropping her eyes, her very throat dyed with guilty blushes.

"Ah!" said Dolly. "And what did Mr. Gowan do, Mollie?"

"He was very kind--and sympathizing," replied Mollie.

"He always is sympathizing," looking at her with affectionate shrewdness. "He is very nice, is n't he, Mollie?"

"Yes," said Mollie. "Very nice, indeed."

"And I dare say you were so frightened and wretched that you cried?"

"Yes," confessed the abashed catechised.

"I thought so." And then, conjuring up in her mind's eye a picture of Mollie, heart-broken, appealing and in tears, beautiful, piteous, and grief-abandoned, she added, with tender impulsiveness, "I don't wonder that he sympathized with you, Mollie."

It revealed itself shortly afterward that his sympathy had not confined

itself to the night Mollie called "dreadful." Since that night he had been a frequent visitor at Bloomsbury Place,--as frequent a visitor as he had been in the days when Dolly had been wont so to entertain him.

A week after the return of Aimée and Grif from London, there fell again upon the modest hotel a hush; but it was not the hush of sympathetic silence which had fallen upon it before,--it was merely a sort of reaction after a slight excitement. The pretty English girl had, to every one's wonder, suddenly returned to earth and had been married! The wisest were bewildered, but such was the fact, nevertheless; nobody could exactly comprehend, but who could deny it? It was a mystery, indeed, until one day, some time after, a usually phlegmatic matron was struck with an idea, and accordingly propounded to her friends a somewhat vaguely expressed problem.

"After the appearance of the lover one heard no more that she was dying?"

"Just so."

"Perhaps the lover had something to do with the matter?", "Ah!"

"Perhaps she was dying for him, and his coming cured her?"

"Exactly. That must have been the case."

And thenceforth the matter was deemed settled. However, the gay, light-hearted party of English had taken their departure,--the friendly young artist who sketched and smoked and enjoyed himself; his handsome young wife, who sketched and played with her handsome child, and enjoyed herself; the beautiful younger sister, who blushed and was charmingly bashful, but enjoyed herself; the fair little saint with the grave youthful face, who took care of them all, and yet enjoyed herself,--the lover, the elder lady, the guest who came to be groomsman, the bride,--they were all gone at last, and their absence was the cause of the hush of which I speak.

There had been a wedding,--a joyous, light-hearted wedding, in which the bride had looked pretty and flower-like and ethereal,--a fragile creature enough in her white dress and under her white veil, but a delightfully happy creature, notwithstanding,--in which the bridegroom had been plainly filled with chivalric tenderness and bliss,--in which the two sisters had been charming beyond measure, and the awkward, affectionate girl friend from the seminary had blushed herself into a high fever. There could not have been a more prettily orthodox wedding, said the beholders. Somehow its glow of young romance touched people, it was so evident that the young couple were fond of each other, and happy and hopeful. There were those who, seeing it solemnized in the small church, shed a few tears, they knew not why, when Grif lifted Dolly's veil and kissed her without a word.

"It is all rose color to them," said one of these soft-hearted ones,

apologetically, to her neighbor.

Rose color! I should think it was.

But if it was all rose color then, what was it that first evening they spent at home,--in their own home, in the little house which was so bright and pretty that it seemed more like a dream than a reality? What color did life look when Grif led Dolly across the threshold, half trembling himself for very joy? What color did it look when he shut the door of the little parlor, and, turning round, went to her and folded her in his arms close to his beating heart?

Rose color! It was golden and more than golden! And yet, for the first minute, Dolly could not speak, and the next she laid her cheek in her favorite place, on the lapel of Grif 's coat, and burst into a great gush of soft, warm tears,--tears without a touch of any other element, however, than love and happiness.

"Home, Grif!" she said.

He was quite pale and he had almost lost his voice, too, but he managed to answer her, unsteadily.

"Yes, Dolly," he said; "home!" And he stroked the bright hair upon his breast, with a world of meaning in his touch.

"Do you think," she said next, "that I am good enough and wise enough to take care of it, and to take care of you, Grif?"

"Do you think," he said, "that I am good enough and wise enough to take care of you?"

She lifted up her face and kissed him.

"We love each other," she whispered, "we trust each other, and so we can help each other, and God will help us both. Ah, Grif, how bright and sweet life is!"

And she scarcely knew, tender little soul, that instead of "life" she should have said "love."

There we will leave them both, merely hinting at the festivities that followed,--merely hinting at the rejoicings at Bloomsbury Place, the gatherings at Brabazon Lodge, and the grand family reception at the house of the bride,--a reception at which Dolly shone forth with renewed splendor, presiding over a gorgeous silver tea-service, which was one of Miss MacDowlas's many gifts, dispensing tea and coffee with the deportment of a housekeeper of many years' standing, and utterly distracting Grif with her matronly airs and graces.

Vagabondia was itself again in these days, but it was turning its brighter side outward. Phil was winning success, too, his position in

the world of art was becoming secured, and Bloomsbury Place was to be touched up and refurnished gradually. Aimée had promised to make her home with Dolly until such time as her sweet little saint's face won her a home of her own. Miss MacDowlas had been adopted into the family circle, and was conscious of being happier than she had ever felt since her long-past youth slipped from her grasp. Tod's teeth were "through," as Mrs. Phil phrased it, and convulsions had not supervened, to the ecstasy of his anxious admirers. And Mollie,--well, Mollie waltzed with Ralph Gowan again on the night of Dolly's reception, and when the dance was at an end, she went and seated herself near her hostess upon the green sofa--it was a green sofa, though a far more luxurious one than Dolly and Grif had ever dared to set their hearts upon in the olden days.

"Dolly," she said, blushing for the last time in this history of mine, and looking down at her bouquet of waxen-white camellias and green leaves,--"Dolly, I suppose Aimée has told you that I am engaged to--to--"

"To Mr. Gowan," suggested Dolly.

"Yes," answered Mollie, "to Mr. Gowan."